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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship of adolescent identity achievement to parental monitoring and support. The 1,012 students who comprise the sample were drawn from two administrations of a survey, the first including sophomores and seniors and the second consisting only of seniors from two Catholic high schools in the Washington, DC area. Correlations between predictor variables revealed a significant association of school monitoring, social monitoring, and support monitoring with gender, each of these constructs being higher among girls than boys. Both types of monitoring correlated highly with each other and with parental support. Social monitoring, school monitoring, and support were significantly correlated with identity achievement, but decision-making was not. A multiple regression analysis was used to clarify the relationship between the combined predictor variables and identity achievement. Parental support and monitoring of social and school activities by parents were significant predictors of identity achievement, lending support to the contention that positive parental involvement provides a structure that enables adolescents to engage in identity exploration. Gender differences were not found in identity achievement, despite higher level of parental monitoring and support among girls. Implications of this finding are discussed. (Contains 3 tables and 23 references.) (MKA)

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THE INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL MONITORING AND SUPPORT ON ADOLESCENT IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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The Influence of Parental Monitoring and Support on Adolescent Identity Development

Carolyn E. Sartor

Abstract

This study examines the relationship of adolescent identity achievement to parental monitoring and support. The 1,012 students who comprise the sample were drawn from two administrations of a survey, the first including sophomores and seniors and the second consisting only of seniors from two Catholic high schools in the Washington, D.C. area. Identity achievement was assessed with the Identity subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory. Parental monitoring of social activities was measured with Barber and Shagle's (1993) behavioral control scale. Monitoring of school-related activities and decision-making in the family were assessed with scales generated for the purposes of this study. The parental support measure was derived from The Interpersonal Relationship Scale (Barber & Shagle, 1992). Correlations between predictor variables revealed a significant association of school monitoring, social monitoring, and support with gender, each of these constructs being higher among girls than boys. Both types of monitoring correlated highly with each other and with parental support. Social monitoring, school monitoring, and support were significantly correlated with identity achievement, but decision-making was not. A multiple regression analysis was used to clarify the relationship between the combined predictor variables and identity achievement. High school seniors were found to have higher identity achievement than sophomores. Parental support and monitoring of social and school activities by parents were significant predictors of identity achievement, lending support to the contention that positive parental involvement provides a structure that enables adolescents to engage in identity exploration. Gender differences were not found in identity achievement, despite higher levels of parental monitoring and support among girls. Implications for this finding are discussed.

The Influence of Parental Monitoring and Support on Adolescent Identity Development

Introduction

Erikson was the first to propose identity formation as the defining feature of the adolescent stage of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968). During adolescence, youth begin to spend a greater amount of time interacting with individuals outside of the family and future roles and values are explored. Although autonomy is a major component of identity achievement, the individuation process is viewed by many theorists as a cooperative endeavor between parent and child that involves the child asserting and parents granting independence while both maintain their connection. Adolescents, then, develop a sense of identity in large part through their relationships with parents and, notably with peers (Grotevant & Cooper, 1986; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Because parents socialize their children through the establishment of rules and communication patterns in the family, the degree and quality of parental control and involvement are believed to have a major impact on identity development.

Baumrind created a typology of parenting styles based on parental control, with three original types: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Baumrind, 1968). Authoritarian parenting is high in restrictiveness and low in relatedness, permissive parenting is characterized as a democratic style of parenting with little limit-setting, and authoritative parenting combines high levels of warmth and responsiveness to the child's needs with moderate levels of autonomy granting.

Numerous elaborations on Baumrind's parenting styles have emerged (Baumrind, 1978; Rollins & Thomas, 1979; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Barber, Olsen & Shagle, 1992) as the parenting literature has expanded. The present study is based upon the model of parenting

proposed by Barber (1997). Barber has identified three dimensions of socialization considered necessary for healthy child development. The first is connectedness with significant others, also referred to as warmth. The consistent positive emotions that come from a sense of relatedness with significant others is associated with the development of social skills as well as a sense that the world is safe and predictable. Such a sense of security is crucial for exploration in identity formation. Parental regulation of behavior, also known as demandingness, is essential in order for children to learn self-regulation. The monitoring of adolescents' behavior serves as an induction into the norms of society through teaching appropriate conformity.

The third component is facilitation of psychological autonomy through responsiveness to adolescents' need to separate themselves from parents. In healthy parent-adolescent relationships, parents provide structure with enough flexibility that adolescents can securely engage in identity exploration, and adolescents may then reciprocate by establishing autonomy without sacrificing relatedness (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994). Attachment to parents continues through late adolescence (O'Koon, 1997), as the relationship between parents and children is renegotiated from one of asymmetrical authority to a more reciprocal relationship with elements of both individuation and connectedness (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985).

Since Baumrind's parenting style typology was proposed, parenting style as a synthesis of parenting behaviors and attitudes has become the focal point of parenting research, with less attention given to the individual qualities and behaviors that comprise these styles. Of the three styles, authoritative parenting has been found to be associated most with a variety of positive outcomes in youth, including low drug use (Mounts & Steinberg, 1995; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996), high academic achievement (McBride-Chang & Chang, 1998; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996), high levels of social competency (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, & Mounts, 1994), low risk of

depression (Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996), and low levels of aggression (Bayer & Cegala, 1992). High identity achievement might also be assumed to be associated with the high levels of warmth and demandingness that define authoritative parenting, but there is little empirical evidence to support this contention. Few studies have examined the influence of parenting on adolescent identity development, despite the fact that identity formation is considered to be the major developmental task of adolescence.

The purpose of this study is threefold. First, it is designed to examine three of the individual components that comprise parenting style as they relate to adolescent identity development. Such an approach provides the opportunity to analyze interrelationships between these components as well as their individual and combined influence on identity development, thus, specifying the underlying mechanisms that influence identity formation. Specifically, parental monitoring of school-related and social activities, the degree to which parents and adolescents share decision-making in the family, and parental emotional support will be measured and used as predictors of adolescent identity achievement. It is hypothesized, in keeping with the positive outcome findings in the parenting literature, that parental monitoring of adolescent behavior, parental support, and collaborative decision-making between parent and child will be positively associated with identity achievement.

The second purpose of this study is to examine age and gender differences in identity achievement. Gender differences in adolescent identity achievement have been inconsistent and are frequently absent (Allen et al., 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). This has been attributed to the nature of the measures being used, as males tend to score higher on identity measures that relate to intrapersonal aspects of identity, while females score higher on interpersonal related items (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981). The measure being used in this study, the Identity

subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal et al., 1981), balances intrapersonal with interpersonal items. Utilization of this identity scale should help to clarify the relationship of the identity construct, defined in terms of both intrapersonal and interpersonal elements, with gender.

Third, a comparison of high school sophomores and seniors is expected to reveal higher identity achievement among seniors. Seniors are facing significant life transitions as they complete high school, at which point they are expected to take on new roles. The commitment phase of identity formation should be closer for them. Empirical research has supported this assumption. Rosenthal et al. (1981) cited significantly higher identity achievement among eleventh versus ninth graders. Similarly, Allen et al. (1994) found that sixteen year-olds demonstrated more clearly defined self-concepts than fourteen year-olds.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of sophomores and seniors from two suburban Catholic high schools in the Washington, D.C. area. The majority of students were from middle-class families, 70% of which were two-parent families. Approximately 70% of the sample was white. Fifty-one percent of the students surveyed were female and 49% male. Data were combined from the surveys administered in May 1996 and September 1996. Seniors included in the study were either seniors during the 1995-1996 school year or the 1996-1997 school year. Sophomores were not sampled in September 1996, resulting in a total sample of 1,012 students, 293 sophomores and 719 seniors.

Measures

Data were collected as part of a larger survey of adolescent community service participation on a project administered by a research team at Catholic University.

Background information Students were asked their gender and current grade in high school.

Identity achievement Identity achievement was measured with the Identity subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (Rosenthal et al., 1981). The scale is designed to assess the degree to which the identity versus identity confusion stage has been negotiated successfully. Items reflect clarity and stability of identity as well as a sense of future direction: "I have a clear idea of what I want to be", "I've got my life together", "I like myself and am proud of what I stand for", "I can't decide what to do with my life", "I find that I have to keep up a front when I am with others", "I don't know what kind of person I am", "I don't really feel involved", "The important things in life are clear to me", "I feel mixed up", "I don't really know who I am", and

"I change my opinion about myself a lot". Students responded to questions on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Inverted items were recoded. Rosenthal et al (1981) found a .56 ($p<.05$) correlation between scores on the Identity subscale of the EPSI and scores on the Identity subscale of Greenberger and Sorensen's (1974) Psychosocial Maturity Inventory. Reliability evaluations of the identity scale in the present sample rendered a Cronbach's alpha of .848.

School monitoring Items on the school monitoring scale were generated for the purposes of this study. The school monitoring scale assessed students' perceptions of their parents' involvement in school-related activities. Students were asked how often their parents helped with homework when asked, how frequently parents attended school programs, watched them in sports or activities, or did volunteer work for their school, and how well parents knew how they were doing in school. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from never (1) to always (5). Reliability was established as Cronbach's alpha of .790.

Social monitoring Parental social monitoring was measured with Barber and Shagle's (1993) behavioral control scale. Monitoring was assessed through student ratings of how much their parents know about their social activities, ranging from "know nothing" (1) to "know everything" (5). Students were asked how much their parents know who their friends are, how they spend their money, what they do in the afternoon after school, and what they do with their free time. Reliability was found to be Cronbach's alpha of .838.

Decision-making The decision-making scale, generated for the purposes of this study, asked students to rate how decisions are made in the family, ranging from parents deciding unilaterally to students deciding alone. In concordance with the hypothesis that a balance between parental involvement and autonomy is associated with positive development, the scale was recoded so

that a score of 5 is indicative of joint decision-making between parents and adolescents and a score of 1 indicates either unilateral decision-making by parents or independent decision-making by students. Factor analysis of the scale revealed two components. A three-item scale with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .682 was created using the following items: "How you spend your money", "Who you hang out with", and "What you watch on tv".

Support The parental support measure was derived from The Interpersonal Relationship Scale (Barber & Shagle, 1992) in which students were asked to rate how often they engage in various communicative, supportive, and conflictual behaviors with their mothers, from never (1) to daily (5). The scale was factor analyzed, yielding three components, the first of which was used to create the support subscale. Items comprising the support measure were "My mother tries to cheer me up when I am upset", "My mother tries to reach a compromise when we disagree", "My mother gives me a lot of care and attention", "My mother enjoys doing things with me", and "My mother makes me feel like the most important person in her life". Scores for the support factor were calculated by taking the mean of the combined item scores. Reliability evaluations for this subscale yielded Cronbach's alpha of .860.

Results

Descriptive analyses revealed a mean identity achievement score of 3.70. The predictive measures of school monitoring (M=3.33), social monitoring (M=3.31) and support (M=3.63) also reflect a trend toward rating slightly above the middle of the scale, but for each scale scores ranged from one to five. The mean score on the decision-making measure was 1.68, indicating a tendency for decisions to be made either by parents alone or youth alone, but not jointly. The distribution of original scores before recoding suggests that decision-making was primarily by students alone. Means for each measure are reported by grade and gender in Table 1.

Correlations among all the study variables were computed and are reported in Table 2. As predicted, identity achievement was significantly positively correlated with school monitoring ($r=.199$; $p<.01$), social monitoring ($r=.204$; $p<.01$), and support ($r=.230$; $p<.01$). The correlation between decision-making and identity was not significant. Decision-making was correlated with both monitoring measures, though not strongly. Grade was not significantly correlated with any other measures used in the study. Positive correlations between gender and school monitoring ($r=.088$; $p<.01$), social monitoring ($r=.146$; $p<.01$), and support ($r=.124$; $p<.01$), indicated that these constructs were higher among girls than boys. Gender was not significantly correlated with identity scores, indicating that the influence of parental monitoring and support on identity achievement is not mediated through gender. The significant positive correlation between school monitoring and social monitoring ($r=.453$; $p<.01$) was anticipated, as parental monitoring tends not to be confined to one aspect of the adolescent's life. Support was highly correlated with school monitoring ($r=.475$; $p<.01$) and social monitoring ($r=.417$; $p<.01$). This finding reflects a predictable association between the emotional support assessed by the

support measure and the more concrete involvement assessed by the school and social monitoring scales.

Regression analyses were conducted in order to clarify the relationship between the combination of predictive measures and identity achievement. The results are summarized in Table 3. A regression analysis was used in the first model to determine the degree to which background characteristics of grade and gender influenced identity achievement scores. Consistent with previously reported correlations, background characteristics alone did not prove to be significant predictors of identity achievement. Together, grade and gender accounted for only .5% of the variability in identity scores. In Model 2, the addition of social monitoring led to a substantial increase in the R^2, with 4.7% of the variance accounted for. The introduction of school monitoring in the third model had a moderate influence on identity scores. Though highly correlated with social monitoring, its unique predictive value was significant. The addition of the decision-making factor in Model 4 did not increase the R^2 significantly. The introduction of support in Model 5 increased predictability of identity achievement considerably, with the R^2 value increasing by .023. Model 5, which combined parental support with the background variables, decision-making factor, and parental monitoring measures, accounted for 8.9% of the variability in identity achievement scores.

The beta weights for Model 5 are indicative of the strength and direction of each predictor variable's relationship to identity achievement. Higher grade level was associated with higher identity achievement. This relationship was not found when the correlation between grade and identity was computed, but only emerged in the context of the combined contribution of all predictor variables. Parental monitoring of school activities was positively associated with identity achievement, as was social monitoring, with the beta value for social monitoring

indicating that youth whose parents were aware of their social activities tended to have higher identity achievement. Parental support was the strongest predictor. High levels of emotional support from parents were positively associated with identity achievement. The degree to which parents and adolescents share decision-making was not significantly associated with scores on the identity measure. Gender was also not significantly related to identity achievement

Discussion

Results of this study support the hypothesis that parental monitoring and support are positively associated with identity achievement in adolescents. Regression analyses indicate that the combined influence of school monitoring, social monitoring and support accounts for 8.7% of the variability in identity scores. In interpreting this finding, it is important to qualify the type of monitoring being utilized by parents, as the influence of parental monitoring cannot be judged solely on the quantity of control exercised by parents. Barber (1996) differentiates two types of parental control, psychological and behavioral. Psychological control consists of intrusive control attempts that impede emotional development of children (e.g. guilt induction and love withdrawal). In contrast, behavioral control involves behavioral management of children through reasoning and making them aware of the consequences of their actions. The monitoring measures used in this study are derived solely from the behavioral control construct. The positive association of parental control with identity development therefore cannot be generalized to all forms of parental control, as this study addresses only the influence of behavioral control on adolescent identity development.

Parental support was the most potent predictor of identity achievement. Its positive correlation with identity was evident both in isolation and in combination with parental monitoring measures. This finding is consistent with the conceptualization of adolescent identity formation as an endeavor that leads to a restructuring of parent-adolescent relationships rather than a process of breaking ties with the family of origin (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). It lends support to the idea that the individuation process involves a delicate balance between freedom and relatedness to parents, as the desire for connection is not overridden by the drive to separate (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Adolescence is a period of exploration, which cannot take place without the establishment of a secure base to return to. Thus, parental support is crucial to

identity achievement. Mellor's (1989) finding that adolescents who defined themselves in terms of their connectedness to others demonstrated more positive resolutions to identity crises supports this conclusion, as does Weiss and Schwarz's (1996) finding that all parenting types involving high degrees of support were associated with positive psychosocial adjustment in adolescents.

Contrary to predictions, the collaborative decision-making measure did not relate significantly to identity scores. The relationship between decision-making and grade in school was also not significant, indicating that the decision-making process for determining who adolescents hang out with, how they spend their money and what they watch on tv does not change from tenth to twelfth grade. This finding suggests that the items used on the decision-making scale are not reflective of issues that are decided differently as adolescents mature from early to late adolescence. The manner in which decisions are made in these areas may have been established when adolescents were younger and changes in the decision-making process on these issues may not be good markers of identity development. The high frequency of students in both age groups reporting that they make decisions on their own lends support to this interpretation.

Gender differences were found in school monitoring, social monitoring and support, with girls reporting higher degrees of each construct. The differences in monitoring could be interpreted as reflecting traditional values of the parents, who tend to be more protective and therefore more aware of the school and social activities of girls than boys. Similarly, girls' reports of high support from mothers could be construed as a tendency among females to view themselves in terms of relatedness to others (Gilligan, 1982). Another possible interpretation of these differences is consistent with the recognition that children's relationships with their parents become more reciprocal during adolescence, as youths begin to control the amount of

information they provide to their parents (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Rather than assuming that parents are more aware of their daughters' activities because they request more information from them, this finding could be interpreted as reflecting girls' tendency to provide voluntarily more information to their parents and to foster their parents' involvement in their school and social lives. Similarly, girls may feel more supported by their mothers because they actively seek their support to a greater extent than boys do. The tendency for girls to demonstrate higher levels of interpersonal competency than boys (Rosenthal et al., 1981) supports this contention.

Girls scored higher than boys on school monitoring, social monitoring and support, all of which significantly predicted identity scores. But girls did not show greater identity achievement. It follows that gender does not mediate the relationship between these predictive measures and identity achievement. This finding suggests that the monitoring and support measures may be more accurate predictors of male than female identity achievement. In addition, it indicates that there are other constructs influential in girls' identity achievement that were not measured in this study. If these constructs were equally influential in identity achievement for boys and girls, higher scores on these scales by girls would translate into higher identity scores for girls, which was not the case. Further exploration of influences on adolescent identity achievement and gender differences among these contributors is warranted.

The high correlation of parental support with school monitoring can be understood in terms of the involvement component that is embedded in these measures. The parental support measure clearly includes an element of parent-child involvement as it is comprised of items such as "My mother gives me a lot of care and attention" and "My mother enjoys doing things with me". The school monitoring measure combines behavioral monitoring (i.e. "My parents know how I am doing in school") with indicators of parental involvement (i.e. "My parents go to

school programs for parents" and "My parents watch me in sports or activities"). However, the social monitoring scale has a comparably high correlation with parental support, even though it reflects parental knowledge of rather than involvement in adolescents' activities.

Furthermore, results of the regression analyses indicate that school monitoring and social monitoring contribute uniquely to the prediction of identity achievement, independent of the influence of support. The common involvement factor alone does not account for high correlations between the monitoring and support measures. The data suggest that there is a tendency for various components of parenting practices to cluster together, supporting the conceptualization of parenting in terms of parenting styles. Authoritative parenting, for example, is referred to as a constellation of parenting attributes defined by such features as emotional support, positive involvement, responsiveness, and appropriate autonomy granting (Baumrind, 1968; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). The finding that social monitoring, school monitoring and emotional support are highly correlated lends support to a tendency for these attributes to occur together.

Grade in school did not correlate significantly with school monitoring or social monitoring, contrary to the assumption that parental behavior monitoring would decrease as adolescents get older. Taking into account the idea that parent-adolescent relationships become more reciprocal from early to late adolescence, it is possible that although overall parental knowledge and involvement do not change significantly from sophomore to senior year in high school, the degree to which adolescents voluntarily provide information to their parents changes. This change would be masked because responses on the monitoring measures do not indicate how parents' information is gained and the degree to which adolescents encourage parental involvement. Grade also did not correlate significantly with identity achievement when

examined in isolation, but when entered into the regression analysis in combination with gender, school monitoring, social monitoring, decision-making, and support, it emerged as a significant predictor of identity. The tendency for seniors to demonstrate higher identity achievement than sophomores endorses the theory that identity becomes more solidified as children reach late adolescence.

Although it provides support for the contention that parental monitoring and support are positively associated with adolescent identity development, there are several limitations to this study. First of all, the students sampled, though ethnically diverse, are from a suburban middle class private Catholic school. Parental involvement among this population is likely to be high and may therefore influence adolescent identity formation differently than in a population in which parents are relatively disengaged. Secondly, the measures of school monitoring and social monitoring provide information solely regarding the extent to which parents have knowledge of their children's activities and do not address the source of this information. Measures that tap the degree to which adolescents provide and parents request information would offer richer data regarding control and communication in the parent-child relationship. Finally, in interpreting the results of this study, it must be kept in mind that the parenting measures reflect behaviors out of context. The whole of the parent-adolescent relationship cannot be inferred by the sum of the parents' behaviors, as they can have various meanings in different contexts. Knowledge of children's grades, for example, may be a positive thing for some adolescents whose good grades are consistently noted and rewarded with praise. In contrast, it could mean that parents are aware of every poor grade their children receive and they fail to encourage their children's efforts.

In sum, though the findings of this study require elaboration, the positive relationship of parental monitoring and support with adolescent identity development has been established.

There is good reason to further examine the association between specific aspects of parenting that are often treated as undifferentiated components of an overall parenting style as they do not contribute equally to developmental outcomes. Differential influences of parental monitoring and support on identity formation in boys and girls requires further exploration as well, as the findings of this study suggest that parental behaviors are more potent predictors of male than female adolescent identity achievement.

Table 1. Means for Identity, School Monitoring, Social Monitoring, Decision-Making, and Support Measures

	Overall	Grade 10		Grade 12	
		M	F	M	F
Identity					
Mean	3.70	3.65	3.61	3.74	3.71
Range	1.18-5.00	1.18-5.00	1.73-4.91	1.27-5.00	1.36-5.00
Standard Deviation	0.66	0.68	0.62	0.67	0.65
School Monitoring					
Mean	3.33	3.29	3.41	3.24	3.41
Range	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00
Standard deviation	0.91	0.85	0.83	0.91	0.93
Social Monitoring					
Mean	3.31	3.15	3.41	3.20	3.45
Range	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00
Standard deviation	0.87	0.84	0.85	0.84	0.88
Decision-making					
Mean	1.68	1.69	1.74	1.74	1.61
Range	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-4.33	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00
Standard deviation	0.94	0.96	0.77	1.07	0.87
Support					
Mean	3.63	3.60	3.78	3.48	3.74
Range	1.00-5.00	1.20-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00	1.00-5.00
Standard deviation	0.94	0.83	0.91	0.98	0.92

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of Identity Achievement, School Monitoring, Social Monitoring, Decision-Making, Support, Gender, and Grade

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Identity						
2. School Monitoring	.199**					
3. Social Monitoring	.204**	.453**				
4. Decision-Making	-.017	.085**	.162**			
5. Support	.230**	.475**	.417**	.030		
6. Gender	-.019	.088**	.146**	-.042	.124**	
7. Grade	.061	-.009	.021	-.027	-.039	.042

* $p<.05$
** $p<.01$

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Predicting Identity Achievement

	Identity Achievement	
Predictors	**R Square**	**Beta for Model 5**
Model 1: Background Characteristics	0.005	
Model 2: Background Characteristics + Social Monitoring	0.047	
Model 3: Background Characteristics + Social Monitoring + School Monitoring	0.062	
Model 4: Background Characteristics + Social Monitoring + School Monitoring + Decision-Making	0.066	
Model 5: Background Characteristics + Social Monitoring + School Monitoring + Decision-Making + Support	0.089	
Grade		0.065*
Gender		-0.051
Social Monitoring		0.123**
School Monitoring		0.084**
Decision-Making		-0.061
Support		0.163**

* $p<.05$
** $p<.01$

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